Gerald fitz Walter (c. 1075–c. 1136) (Gerald de Windsor)

Origin and Family

Born c. 1075. Died before 1136.[3]

Father: Walter fitz Other (c. 1037–c. 1116)
Mother: Beatrice
Spouse: Princess Nesta (c. 1076–bef. 1136)
Children[1]:

1. David FitzGerald (1099–1176), Bishop of St. David's
2. Maurice FitzGerald (1105–1176)
3. William FitzGerald (1106–1173). Inherited Carew castle and is the ancestor of the noble family of Carew.
4. Angharad (1108–) married William de Barri and was the mother of Gerald de Barri – known as Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales, the noted author and historian.

Gerald fitz Walter, son of Walter fitz Other, was a Norman who grew up at Windsor Castle as the son of a military man and took an interest in military affairs himself. Gerald FitzWalter, as son of the Castellan of Windsor, fashioned his name as Gerald de Windsor but was known in his time by both names.

Rhys Ap Tewdwr Effigy in St David's Cathedral

Following the Norman conquest of England, efforts were made to extend control into Wales. After the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1093, Norman authority expanded into South Wales, and Gerald was appointed castellan of Pembroke under Arnulf de Montgomery

About the same time, Flanders (a region of modern day Belgium) had been devastated by floods and was becoming dangerously overpopulated, causing many Flemings to escape to England. Initially welcomed, they soon began to irritate their hosts. Henry I's solution to this little local difficulty was to shift them en masse to the remote farming settlement in south Pembrokeshire, creating an area known as Little England Beyond Wales.[4] This Flemish colony was led by Gerald de Windsor.

Pembroke Castle

It was not long before Gerald de Windsor was tested as Castellan of Pembroke Castle. In 1096 Welshmen laid siege to Pembroke Castle. After a lengthy impasse, they were deceived by *Gerald* who, although he had hardly

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any provisions left, threw his last few fitches of bacon over the palisade at the besiegers to make them believe that he was well supplied. The next day he had a letter, saying that reinforcements were due, deliberately found by the Welsh. It was enough to convince the attackers to abandon their siege.[7] Gerald became famous for his gallant defense of the fortress against the Welsh and his clever strategy (*figmenta exquisitiora*)[5] by which he induced them to abandon the siege.

Gene Yale, a descendent of Gerald fitz Walter, visited Pembroke in 2006.

As a reward for his loyal service, King Henry I granted to “Gerald son of Walter de Windsor” the English Manor at Moulsford. This is historically important as it establishes Gerald as “Gerald fitz Walter de Windsor.”[6]

Moulsford Manor

In addition to the Moulsford connection, the common Coat of Arms by Gerald and Walter further validates this lineage.[5] See “Further Readings” for more information on the Yale Coat of Arms.

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In 1096, shortly after his successful defense, Gerald asked for and received permission from King Henry to marry Nesta, Princess of Deheubarth and daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr. It is said his proposal was prompted by a desire to make himself and his Flemish colony more secure,[7] but it may have been more of a political marriage arranged by King Henry I, as Normans rarely married non-Normans in England (the intermarriage rate was less than 5 per cent for four generations after the conquest).[8] Regardless, we shall treat Nesta separately, as she was more famous and in many ways more important historically than Gerald.

Carew Castle

As a dowry from Nesta, Gerald received the Carew lands in South Wales. In 1100, they built the Carew Castle there which was considered strategically important. This castle was their primary residence until at least 1105.

In 1100, Gerald traveled to Ireland to seek the hand in marriage of King Murrogh's daughter for his overlord Arnulf de Montgomery**.** He was successful. Shortly thereafter, Arnulf and his brother Robert defied the king by building a castle at Brugge in spite of the king's prohibition. This caused King Henry to disinherit them and condemn them to perpetual exile.[3] In 1102, King Henry then gave Pembroke Castle to Gerald as its permanent steward.

According to the medieval Chronicle of Princes (*Brut y tywysogion*), after Gerald obtained from the king the castle of Pembroke, he seems to have rebuilt it in the place called 'Little Cenarth' in 1105. There "he deposited all his riches, with his wife, his heirs, and all dear to him; he fortified it with a ditch and wall, and a gateway with a lock on it."[5]

For the next few years, Gerald and his Flemish army roamed the southern coast of Wales and laid waste to several Welsh ports in a continuing effort to subjugate the Welsh. Wales was a lawless place at the time with constant wars and in-fighting. Cadwgan, a Welsh prince, had achieved some level of amity with King Henry, but his son Owain ap Cadwgan was out of control. In 1109, he abducted Nesta, Gerald's wife, along with their children. This started a civil war and forever caused Nesta to be called the "Helen of Wales". Six years later, Gerald caught up with Owain and killed him, avenging his honor. See Princess Nesta for details of this famous abduction and its aftermath.

End of Life

Gerald died before 1136. However, after Gerald killed Owain ab Cadwgan, "he no longer appears in the Annals of Cambria or in the Chronicles of the Princes, the presumption is that he did not long survive his enemy"[9], so he may have died many years earlier.

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He is the ancestor of the Fitzgerald families, in both England and Ireland, and is also the ancestor of the Earls of Kildare, the Lords of Leinster and the Earls of Offaly.

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
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FamilySearch ID: LCZG-841
Wikipedia: Gerald of Windsor

Further Reading:

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- Wikipedia: Little England Beyond Wales

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8. FamilyTreeDNA: Genetic Origins of the Fitzgeralds

9. Rev. E. Barry, Records of the Barrys of County Cork from the earliest to the present time., Cork, 1902, pg 4.

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